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Wanted: "An Elite Corps of Assassins"

A U.S. Agent's Modest Proposal for Saving the World from Collapse

ASSASSINATION is always a temptation, and arguments have been made that the modern world requires it. A measure of the sort of mind that feels this temptation is provided in the papers of an American intelligence agent named Carleton Coon.

During World War II Coon was implicated in a plot to assassinate a French official in North Africa.

When he returned to Washington, according to Anthony Cave Brown's book, "The Last Hero—Wild Bill Donovan," Coon wrote a paper advocating "the formation of an elite corps of assassins." He said he gave the paper to Donovan, head of the Office of Strategic Services.

This elite corps, Coon argued, would bring order to the running of a world "now too small and too tight to permit a continuation of the process of trial and error." The problem with the modern world, Coon wrote, was that "all our ap-

ples are now in one barrel, and if one rots the lot is destroyed."

Coon feared that "clear and objective" minds wouldn't prevail in the new technological society and proposed an alternative:

"Therefore some other power, some third class of individuals aside from the leaders and the scholars must exist, and this third class must have the task of thwarting mistakes, diagnosing areas of potential world disequilibrium, and nipping the causes of potential disturbances in the bud. There must be a body of men whose task it is to throw out the rotten apples as soon as the first spots of decay appear

"A body of this nature must exist undercover. It must either be a power unto itself, or be given the broadest discretionary powers by the highest human authorities.

"The only organizations in existence today which have even the rudiments of

what is needed in the formation of such a body of men are the OSS and SOE [the British counterpart]. Agents of these two organizations are trained to act undercover, to act ruthlessly and without fear. We include objective scientists in our midst, and men of the widest experience in the political, economic and diplomatic fields.

"It seems therefore to me not too wild, too visionary or too improbable a thought to suppose that from these two groups a smaller can be selected; a group of men, sober-minded and without personal ambition, men competent to judge the needs of our world society and take whatever steps are necessary to prevent this society from a permanent collapse."

Cave Brown states that Donovan did not include this proposal in his papers, "nor did he circulate it within his organization or to other government organizations. Perhaps even in wartime he gauged it imprudent and undesirable."